

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks on Senate Action on Health Care Reform Legislation

October 13, 2009

Good afternoon. Today we reached a critical milestone in our effort to reform our health care system. After many months of thoughtful deliberation, the fifth and final committee responsible for health care reform has passed a proposal that has both Democratic and Republican support. This effort was made possible by the tireless efforts of Chairman Max Baucus and the other members of the Senate Finance Committee. It's a product of vigorous debate and difficult negotiations.

After the consideration of hundreds of amendments, it includes ideas from both Democrats and Republicans, which is why it enjoys the support of people from both parties. And I want to particularly thank Senator Olympia Snowe for both the political courage and the seriousness of purpose that she's demonstrated throughout this process.

Now, this bill is not perfect, and we have a lot of difficult work ahead of us. There are still significant details and disagreements to be worked out over the next several weeks as the five separate bills from the Senate and the House are merged into one proposal. But I do believe the work of the Senate Finance Committee has brought us significantly closer to achieving the core objectives I laid out early in September.

Most importantly, this bill goes a long way towards offering security to those who have insurance and affordable options for those who don't. It reins in some of the worst practices of the insurance industry, like the denial of coverage due to preexisting conditions. It also sets up an insurance exchange that will make coverage affordable for those who don't currently have it. And as the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has certified, it will slow the growth of health care costs in the long term, and it will not add a penny to our deficit.

The committee's progress over the past several weeks is the culmination of work by all five committees and numerous Members of Congress over the better part of this year. We've reached out to stakeholders across the spectrum: doctors and nurses; businesses and workers; hospitals and even drug companies. And we've considered a wide variety of ideas and proposals in an effort to find common ground.

As a result of these efforts, we are now closer than ever before to passing health reform. But we're not there yet. Now is not the time to pat ourselves on the back. Now is not the time to offer ourselves congratulations. Now is the time to dig in and work even harder to get this done. And in this final phase, I hope that we will continue to engage each other with the spirit of civility and seriousness that has brought us this far and that this subject deserves.

I commend the Chairman and the committee's members for their achievement and the example that they've set, and I look forward to continue to work with Congress in the weeks ahead. We are going to get this done.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:11 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Health care reform legislation, Senate action.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Baucus, Max S.; Snowe, Olympia J.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Senate :: Finance Committee; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Health insurance exchange, proposed; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers.

DCPD Number: DCPD200900802.